THE POPES
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THE POPES

Considered as the ancient political arbitrators of Europe, and as the heads of the Church, being part of a reply to Doctor Southey.

[*Continued from page* 146.]

That in ages of comparative ignorance, before taste was yet cultivated, or a love for art and literature had revived, men should not have felt as keenly as ourselves the beauties of classic lore—that they should sometimes have preferred to the writings of pagan antiquity, works, if not always of higher importance in themselves, at least better adapted to their wants, their habits and inclinations, is not a reproach which wisdom should urge against those who preserved the inestimable treasures of ancient knowledge. The cause of profane literature was no doubt important—but that of sacred was still more so, if we are not mistaken; and rather than censure "the monkish transcribers," who were sometimes compelled to sacrifice the work of a poet or orator of Rome to the preservation of the treatise of a christian father, we should lament and deplore the distress and hardships of those times, when from the scarcity of paper men were reduced to the painful alternative.*

What popes were the enemies of learning we are at a loss to discover. St. Gregory the great is the only one to our knowledge, upon whom the protestants have personally fixed that imputation. The motives for that charge are extremely frivolous; and because that pontiff enjoined Didier, archbishop of Vienna, to discontinue the functions of a preceptor of grammar, alleging that such an office was not very compatible with the episcopal duties, that great man has been denounced as an enemy to learning.—But to repel this silly accusation, it would be sufficient to refer to his epistles, where he expressly asserts that a knowledge of profane literature is extremely serviceable to the cause of religion. Ep. L. 5. in 1 Reg. c. iii. The story of Galileo, which once made so much noise in Europe, has been now so often and so fully explained, that ignorance or bad faith alone will condescend to cite it.†

These are the absurd anecdotes which our adversaries are not ashamed to oppose to the general voice of history, which proclaims the popes the enlighteners of nations, the founders of European civilization! These are the pretended, and even were we, to admit their truth, the meagre, the isolated facts which they oppose to the constant, the unremitted exertions of the sovereign pontiffs to diffuse along with christianity, the blessings of liberty and civilization—to dispel the clouds of ignorance and barbarism—to emancipate nations from the servitude of error and superstition; and by extending the sphere of intelligence, to fit them by degrees for that high knowledge which they were one day to attain under their auspices!

"Lest the light burst too strongly on the unprepared mind!"

At what time were the popes the enemies of learning? Was it when they passed those decrees, as benevolent as they were wise, which enjoined every bishop to maintain a school in his diocess for the education of "the clerks and other poor gratis;" or was it when they planted in Europe those universities, which have so much contributed to the diffusion of knowledge; or when they took so active a part in the memorable restoration of letters, when they rewarded so liberally the discovery of manuscripts, and the labours of the infant press, or when again in more recent times, they patronised intellectual merit of every kind with so much munificence!

* "After the Saracens conquered Egypt in the 7th century," says Dr. Robertson, "the communication between that country and the people settled in Italy, or in other parts of Europe, was almost entirely broken off, and the papyrus was no longer in use among them. They were obliged, on that account, to write all their books upon parchment, and as the price of that was high, books became extremely rare, and of great value. We may judge of the scarcity of the materials for writing them from one circumstance. There still remain several manuscripts of the eighth, ninth, and following centuries, written on parchment, from which some former writing had been erased, in order to substitute a new composition in its place. History of Charles V. vol. i. note. p. 237.

† See Bergier's Dict. Theol. Art. Galileo, and Feller's Dict. Biograph. Art. Copenic, where it is shown that the Roman inquisition condemned Galileo, not for maintaining the system of the earth's rotation, but for founding that system on the divine authority of scripture.

2. *The popes considered as Heads of the Church.*

It is remarkable that Dr. Southey, in the course of this chapter, has never once attempted to impugn the dogma of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the pope, by arguments drawn from scripture and tradition. All his reasoning turns on the personal vices of some popes. He first draws a hideous caricature of the sovereign pontiffs; and he then asks triumphantly if that portrait be compatible with their sacred functions, with their accredited character? The passage which we shall now transcribe at some length, contains the whole sum of his reasoning on this subject; and after perusing it, we think our readers will agree, that a bad argument was seldom put with more astonishing point, energy, & effect. "The learned Jews," says Doctor Southey, "still made this one of the ingredients that went to constitute a prophet, that he should be *perfectus in moralibus*, a person of exact morals, and unblameable in his life; the gift of prophecy being a ray of such a light, as never darts itself upon a dunghill." I think, sir, you would not dispute the reasonableness of this opinion, if you were not apprehensive how it might be applied. For can we suppose, if the Roman pontiff were what his advocates represent him, that less would be required for a pope than for a prophet? Might it not be expected that Heaven would so far interfere in the choice of its own accredited representative and plenipotentiary on earth, as always to provide that the election should fall upon one, whose former life had been at least blameless; or by an unequivocal manifestation of its consent, that it should have made regeneration a necessary consequence of the appointment, so that the newly-created pope, with the title of holiness, should receive the grace, and put on sinless perfection, as well as infallibility with his pontificals?—Would the offence have been less for Cossa or Borgia to take upon themselves such an office, then for Uzzah to approach the ark? "The Holy Ghost," says Bishop Taylor, "never dwells in the house of passion. Will it dwell with ambition, with avarice, with impiety, with all the cardinal sins? For in their company, the Holy Spirit must have dwelt;—with all these sins in monstrous hypostasis, it must have been united, if the pretensions of the papal church were true." P. 395-6. How many errors are accumulated in this elaborate passage What is its evident tendency, but to prove the doctrine of the ancient Vaudois, that *grace is necessary to dominion*; that vice destroys the legitimacy of power? If even the popes were guilty of the vices which Dr. Southey attributes to them, how could those vices destroy their sacred character, their mission, their divine authority? The comparison between the popes, and the prophets of the old law, is perfectly illusive. Divine Providence, in raising up those extraordinary men to excite his chosen people to the observance of his law, to announce to them the chastisement which he reserved for their offences, or the rewards which awaited their fidelity, or to unveil to their view the great mysteries, of which they were one day to be the instrument, Divine Providence, we say, was no doubt pleased that the men thus selected should be worthy of their special calling, that they should command by their virtues the esteem and reverence of the people, and that their sanctity should at once prove and justify their mission. But is it so with the popes? Do we pretend that they receive an immediate or extraordinary mission from Heaven? Do we not assert, on the contrary, that they derive their character, their mission, their jurisdiction, by the channel of ordinary succession? Was a blameless life an essential condition in the old law to the legitimacy of the high priests, who discharged ordinary functions by an ordinary right? Were they always men of immaculate morals? No; the Roman pontiff then stands in the same condition.

The political world furnishes us with a simple, but striking analogy. All the great conquerors, the great law-givers, the authors of the great institutions, were men of extraordinary talent, or extraordinary virtue, or both. But if their works could only have been perpetuated by a perpetuation of the same qualities, if the art of preservation required the same extraordinary powers; as the art of conquest, what would have become of the world, or what stability could there have been in human affairs!

But why should not the pope have impeccability as well as infallibility? Why should he not put on sinless perfection with his pontificals? Such is the reasoning of Dr. Southey.

That the decisions of the Pope in matters of faith, when addressed ex cathedra to the universal church, are infallible, though not an article of faith, is the better, the more ancient, and the more generally received *opinion in the church: that such decisions* when they have received the open consent, or the tacit assent of the church assembled, or dispersed, are infallible, is an article of faith to which every catholic *must subscribe.*

This eminent prerogative belongs to the sovereign pontiff in virtue of the promises of Christ; because he is the supreme authority in the catholic church, and because the general council itself cannot be assembled but with his consent, and its decisions cannot be binding, till they receive his approbation and confirmation.

Now, if because the Pope has received the plenitude of ecclesiastical authority, (to use the words of the general council of Florence,*) he should be exempt from sin, there is no reason why they, who exercise a subordinate degree of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, should not enjoy, in a proportionate degree, the prerogative of impeccability. Thus bishops "whom the Holy Ghost hath appointed to govern the church," thus curates, who under them are charged with the care of souls, must all put in their respective claims to the gift of impeccability. For the power which the curate exercises, is as sacred as that of the Pope; although the degree is different.

Now the gift of impeccability could not be extended in a greater or less degree to the members of the Christian Hierarchy, without destroying more or less the free-will of man; but the destruction of free-will cannot redound to the glory of God, or the merit of man: nay, the destruction of free-will involves the destruction of Christianity, which is only the development of primitive religion, or the supreme law of intelligences, is founded on the moral nature of man. So pregnant with absurdity is the *system of Dr. Southey!*

Why are not the popes impeccable!

"Why hath no man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason; man is not a fly."

Why are not the popes impeccable! Because Christ has not so willed it; because he has said, that the scribes and the pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses; (and their authority was not less sacred, less legitimate than that of the ministers of the new law;) "All therefore," continues our Lord, "all therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do, *but according to their works do ye not; for they say and do not.*" Matt. c. xxii. v. 2. 3.

Why are not the popes impeccable! Because our Lord, while he promised his apostles and their successors, that he would remain with them "all days even to the end of the world," while he promised that the Holy Ghost should abide with them for ever; "that he should teach them all things whatsoever he should have said to them; while he promised again to Peter and his successors specially and exclusively, that he should build his church upon them, that the

* Definimus Sanctam Apostolicam sedem et Romanum Pontificem in universum orbem tenere primatum et ipsum Pontificem Romanum successorem esse Beati Petri principis apostolorum, et verum Christi vicarium, totiusque Ecclesiæ caput et omnium christianorum patrem ac Doctorem existire; et ipsi Beato Petro pascendi, regendi et gubernandi universalem ecclesiam Domino nostro Jesu Christo *plenam potestatem* traditam esse, quemadmodum etiam in gestis œcumenicorum conciliorum, et in sacris canonibus continetur. Coll. Conc. Labb. t. xiii.

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gates of hell should never prevail against that church; while he gave to them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the power of binding and of loosing; while he prayed that their faith should never fail:—our Lord, we say, while by these magnificent promises to the church in general, and to it's head in particular, he established *the infallibility* of his church, and the consequent perpetuity of sound doctrine; he did not say to his apostles, that they should have no unworthy successors, that the lives of their successors should never dishonour the sanctity of their functions, or that vice should never stain the purity of the sacerdotal robe. No, he says to them in a voice of thunder, "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh: it were better for him, had he never been born.!"

Christ undoubtedly might have established his church differently; he might *have given* angels to govern it—he might have committed it to the care of superior intelligences; but the moral prodigy would have been less;—the work of divine love, and divine wisdom, and divine power, would have been less amazing in that supernatural agency, than in the unfailing guidance of a Church by a ministry subject to all the errors and frailties of humanity.

"Would the offence have been less," exclaims Dr. Southey, "for Cossa or Borgia to take upon themselves such an office, than for Uzzah to approach the ark?" What a monstrous confusion of ideas!

1. Uzzah was no priest—he was an arrogant king, whom the Almighty struck with leprosy for usurping the priestly functions.

2. *Was the same punishment to be inflicted* upon Cossa and Borgia, as upon Uzzah? Do we live under the regime of temporal reward and punishments? Will Dr. Southey presume to dictate to the Almighty when and what species of punishment *he should* inflict upon those who violate his law? "Will the Holy Ghost dwell in the house of passion?" Who ever pretended it could? What divine, in maintaining *the infallibility of the dogmatical decisions of the* pope, ex cathedra, or what Catholic in holding the infallibility of the *dogmatical* decisions of a pope and general council, ever supposed that that infallibility was personal or individual. so as to influence their ordinary discourse and actions? Have they not asserted, on the contrary, that that infallibility was *purely official*, if we may use the expression; that it belonged to them solely in the quality of judges of religious doctrine? If Dr. Southey answers that the Holy Ghost will never control the exercise of an authority which is vested in the hands of wicked men, he merely repeats the old objection that *grace is necessary to dominion*; an objection which we think we have already satisfactorily disposed of.

(*To be concluded in our next.*)

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